

POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 17 DECEMBER 2025

Present: Councillor Terry (Chair);

Councillors Leng (Vice-Chair), Barnett-Ward, Eden, Emberson, Ennis, Gittings, Griffith, Nikulina, Rowland, R Singh, Thompson, White and Yeo

45. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair made the following announcement:

"The thoughts and prayers of everyone at the Council are with the families, loved ones and friends who were killed or injured in the horrific and senseless attack at Bondi, along with the local community where it occurred.

It is not the first time this year that we have seen a terrorist attack on the Jewish community take place during a religious celebration, this time targeting innocent people attending a Hanukkah event.

We welcome the assurances over the weekend by Thames Valley Police colleagues that dedicated patrols will take place around synagogues and other Jewish venues during the remaining days of Hanukkah and I would echo police calls for people to remain vigilant and report anything suspicious to them.

For its part, Reading Council will reach out to faith leaders from Reading's Jewish community to understand if there is any support we can offer locally.

While the weekend's attack took place on the other side of the world, there is absolutely no doubt it resonates within our local communities, and particularly for people who may have family or friends nearby or visiting. I would stress once again the importance of communities standing together against hatred in all its forms.

Could I ask everyone present to please stand for a minute's silence."

The meeting stood for a minute's silence.

46. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

47. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by members of the public:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Emily Brooke	FM Conway – odour complaints	Cllr Ennis

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2.	Emily Brooke	FM Conway – odour complaints	Cllr Ennis
3.	Emily Brooke	FM Conway – odour complaints	Cllr Ennis
4.	Alison May	Waste Incinerators Bill	Cllr Rowland

(The full text of the questions and responses was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

48. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by Councillors:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Cllr R Singh	Rough Sleeping	Cllr Yeo
2.	Cllr R Singh	Costs of Mayoralty	Cllr Emberson
3.	Cllr White	Homes for Reading – Equality Impact Assessment	Cllr Terry
4.	Cllr White	Pension Fund Investments	Cllr Terry
5.	Cllr White	Article 4 Direction – East Reading	Cllr Leng

(The full text of the questions and responses was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

49. SIMPLER RECYCLING - INTRODUCTION OF GLASS COLLECTIONS FROM KERBSIDE

The Committee considered a report setting out the design, mobilisation, and go live plan for introducing kerbside glass collections.

The report explained that central government had set a compliance date for glass and food collection of 1 April 2026, but that like many local authorities across the country Reading faced logistical and procurement challenges in meeting this date. Reading had been ahead of many other councils in the conversion of the fleet's vehicles to electric vehicles and had therefore engaged extensively with the vehicle supply market in consideration of all options currently available to deliver this service. This engagement had identified that there were limited manufacturers for the size and configuration of vehicle required (narrow with low entry), with the only viable option currently in manufacture being diesel powered. Due to supply chain delays (vehicles and containers), the practical start of the service was predicted to be April 2027. These delays were a direct consequence of multiple local authorities all working towards the government's timetable. Whilst the consequential delays were unwelcome, they allowed for a joint programme of service enhancement to also include flexible plastics on recycling rounds, which was required from April 2027.

The report further explained that a comprehensive implementation plan would underpin the introduction of kerbside glass and flexible plastic collection and set out details of the proposed communications activity leading up to the launch of the service. Container delivery would take place ahead of the service go-live, with the standard provision being 55-litre plastic boxes (or suitable alternative sacks as needed). Round design work had been completed, and four new service rounds were required to deliver the service. Collections would be

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provided on a fortnightly cycle and scheduled to take place on the opposite week to green waste collections, which would minimise the number of waste receptacles presented at the kerbside on collection days.

Resolved –

That the timeline for the implementation of kerbside glass collection as set out the report be approved.

50. READING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The Committee considered a report setting out for endorsement the draft Reading Economic Development Framework 2025-35, which was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the draft Economic Development Framework provided a strategic blueprint for delivering sustainable growth, prosperity, and inclusion across Reading over the next 10 years, with specific actions outlined for the first five years. The Framework built on previous strategies, aligned with other related national and local plans and prepared Reading for anticipated geo-political and economic shifts. Reading's Economy and Destination Agency (REDA) and the Council were the lead agencies and would oversee the implementation of plans and projects to promote investment and creation of high-value jobs in emerging technologies, green sectors and growth industries, and to reduce social isolation and long-term unemployment through inclusive economic participation.

The report noted that the framework identified eight priority interventions focused around the four thematic pillars of Inclusive Reading, Smart and Sustainable Reading, Destination Reading, and Reading City Region. The Framework had been developed using the most recent sources of private and public sector data available, but the new Index of Multiple Deprivation 2025 had now been received and would be used to inform the implementation plan for the actions set out in the Framework.

Resolved –

- (1) That it be noted that the new Reading Economic Development Framework 2025-35 had been co-created by Reading Borough Council and Reading's Economy and Destination Agency (REDA) with the support of consultants EMGT, commissioned by REDA;**
- (2) That the draft Reading Economic Development Framework 2025-35, as attached at Appendix 1 and described in the report, be endorsed;**
- (3) That an implementation plan based on the actions identified in the Economic Development Framework be produced and an annual progress report submitted to the Policy Committee.**

51. LAND & PROPERTY ASSET DISPOSAL POLICY

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The Committee considered a report seeking approval to adopt and implement a new Policy and procedure framework for the disposal of the Council's land and property assets. The proposed new policy was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report noted that it was best practice for the Council to adopt a formal policy for disposal of land and assets, so that the process was transparent. The proposed Land and Property Assets Disposal Policy attached to the report at Appendix 1, would apply to all disposals of property held by the Council excluding residential properties within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) (where Right to Buy rules would apply), statutory lease extensions and shared ownership disposals. The policy would provide information about the Council's approach to sales and lettings to commercial and third sector parties interested in using, leasing or buying Council property.

The report explained that the policy set out the methodology by which properties would be identified for disposal and what could be expected to happen next. Assets would be reviewed on a cyclical basis or when service needs changed. The policy also explained the Council's legal obligation under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972, where the Council must obtain the best consideration reasonably obtainable when disposing of land and property. It outlined the requirements where the Council wished to dispose land or property at undervalue, including the need to evidence that the disposal would promote economic, social or environmental wellbeing. In addition the policy set out the disposal process and procedure, governance and responsibilities, and details of how bids would be evaluated.

Resolved –

That the Land & Property Asset Disposal Policy, as attached to the report at Appendix 1, be approved, adopted and implemented.

52. HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES FRAMEWORK

The Committee considered a report introducing the principle of embedding a Health in All Policies approach across the Council and setting out a proposed framework and actions for embedding the approach. The draft Health in All Policies (HiAP) Framework was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the HiAP Framework was a collaborative approach that aimed to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of Reading residents by embedding the consideration of health, equity and sustainability into Council policy and decision-making processes across the work of all services. The Council had already made good progress in seeking to embed health in all policies across the Council and the framework set out the ambition to go further and ensure that the impact on health and reducing health inequalities was at the heart of all decision making across the Council.

The report noted that over the previous 12 months the Council had taken a series of steps to inform the HiAP Framework with the intention of developing a systematic approach. This had included workshops facilitated by the Local Government Association with the Senior Leadership Team and Lead Councillors, greater investment into the public health team, the production of a State of the Borough Report and the creation of a HiAP Fund to help services

address public health needs. HiAP embraced the complexity of seeking long term outcomes through sustained coordinated actions across directorates, agencies, and professional silos. The HiAP Framework set out a change management approach and engagement plan that would provide a systematic process that engaged leadership and staff in preparing for change, communicating the vision, implementing the change, embedding it into daily operations, and reviewing the outcomes.

Resolved –

That the Health in All Policies Framework as set out in Appendix 1 be adopted and its implementation endorsed.

53. 2025/26 QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE & MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered a report setting out an overview of the Council's financial and performance position as at the end of Quarter 2 of the 2025/26 financial year. The report included updates on the General Fund Revenue and Capital budgets, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), savings delivery, debt performance, and progress against the Corporate Plan performance measures and projects. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 - Summary of the General Fund Budget and Forecast 2025/26
- Appendix 2 - Savings Tracker Quarter 2
- Appendix 3 - General Fund Capital Programme
- Appendix 4 - HRA Capital Programme
- Appendix 5 - Council Plan Performance Measures Quarter 2
- Appendix 6 - Council Plan Projects Quarter 2

The report stated that the forecast General Fund revenue outturn position for Quarter 2 was an adverse net variance of £3.968m, a net improvement of £0.212m from the Quarter 1 position reported to the Committee at its meeting held on 17 September 2025 (Minute 26 refers). The major cost pressures were summarised. The report also provided an update on savings delivery, noting that £3.975m (34%) of savings had been delivered, £3.663m (32%) were on track, £2.143m (19%) were categorised as non-deliverable, and £1.735m (15%) were at risk.

The report recommended further adjustments to the General Fund Capital Programme, which was set out in Appendix 3, that would result in a revised approved budget of £76.754m for 2025/26. Against this proposed revised budget, the current forecast was a positive net variance of £0.211m relating to the Delivery Fund.

The report noted that the approved HRA budget assumed a drawdown from HRA reserves of £5.047m. At Quarter 2, the forecast revenue outturn position on the HRA was an adverse net variance to budget of £0.197m, a net increase of £0.021m from Quarter 1. Therefore, a drawdown from the HRA Reserve was forecast of £5.244m. The report proposed adjustments to the HRA Capital Programme, set out in Appendix 4, that would result in a revised approved budget of £64.483m for 2025/26. At Quarter 2, the HRA Capital Programme was forecasting to spend to budget against this proposed revised budget.

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The report also set out performance against the Council Plan success measures. Of the 17 Council Plan Performance Measures monitored monthly or quarterly, 47% were currently at or above target (green), 24% were within 10% of the target (amber), 24% were 10% or more off target (red) and 5% (1 measure) could not be reported for Quarter 2 but would be updated for Quarter 3. Of the 51 Council Plan Projects, 2% were currently delivered (blue), 63% were on track (green), 31% were at risk (amber) and 4% were off track (red). The full list of Performance Measures was attached to the report at Appendix 5 and Projects at Appendix 6.

Resolved –

- (1) That it be noted that:**
 - (a) The forecast General Fund revenue outturn position for Quarter 2 was an adverse net variance of £3.968m (as set out in Appendix 1);**
 - (b) £3.975m (34%) of savings had been delivered (blue) and £3.663m (32%) of savings were on track to be delivered (green) by March 2026. £2.143m (19%) of savings were currently categorised as non-deliverable (red) and £1.735m (15%) categorised as at risk of delivery (amber) (as set out in Appendix 2);**
 - (c) The General Fund Capital Programme was forecasting a positive net variance of £0.211m against the proposed revised budget of £76.754m (as set out in Appendix 3);**
 - (d) There was a total £2.927m Delivery Fund available for 2025/26 (inclusive of 2024/25 approved carry forwards), and at Quarter 2 £2.801m of this funding had been allocated out to approved schemes;**
 - (e) The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was projecting an adverse net variance of £0.197m as at the end of Quarter 2, which resulted in a forecast drawdown from HRA Reserves of £5.244m rather than the approved budgeted drawdown of £5.047m;**
 - (f) The HRA Capital Programme was forecasting to spend to budget against the proposed revised budget of £64.483m (as set out in Appendix 4);**
 - (g) The performance achieved against the Council Plan success measures was as set out in Section 12 of the report and Appendices 5 and 6;**
 - (h) An annual refresh of ‘Investing in Reading’s Future: Council Plan 2025-28’ would take place, commencing in October 2025, including an update on achievements in 2025 and updated Projects and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs);**
- (2) That the proposed amendments to the General Fund Capital Programme (as set out in Section 7 of the report and Appendix 3) and resulting in a revised Capital Programme budget of £76.754m for 2025/26, be approved;**
- (3) That the amendments to the HRA Capital Programme (as set out in further detail in Section 10 of the report and Appendix 4) and resulting in a**

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revised HRA Capital Programme budget of £64.483m for 2025/26, be approved.

54. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2026/27- 2028/29 UPDATE

The Committee received a report providing an update on the development of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2026/27-2028/29. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 - Summary of the Proposed General Fund Budget 2026/27 to 2028/29
- Appendix 2 - Summary of General Fund Budget Changes 2026/27 to 2028/29
- Appendix 3 - Summary of HRA Budget 2026/27 to 2028/29
- Appendix 4 - General Fund Capital Programme 2026/27 to 2028/29
- Appendix 5 - HRA Capital Programme 2026/27 to 2028/29

The report set out the national and local context for the development of the MTFS, noting that the Council was facing significant financial challenges in line with those being experienced at a national level: General Fund revenue adverse variances totalling £19.6m across the last three financial years, and a cumulative deficit of £24.9m on the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant. The 2025/26 Quarter 2 Performance & Monitoring report (minute 53 above refers) showed an adverse net variance of £3.968m, including a net deficit of £5.424m on Children's Services.

The report explained that the MTFS Update included the current working assumptions following the announcements made by Central Government in the Local Government Finance Policy Statement and the Autumn Budget. These assumptions would need to be reviewed once the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement had been published. It also outlined the key planning assumptions relating to Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care pressures, pay award, capital financing and Council tax, and noted that, despite the actions taken to date, the Council still had a significant projected budget gap across the three years of the MTFS. A public consultation on the MTFS update, including where future savings would best be focused, would take place between 18 December 2025 and 17 January 2026. Following the conclusion of the consultation and the announcement of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, a further report would be submitted to Policy Committee on 16 February 2026, recommending approval of a balanced budget to Council in order that it could approve its budget and associated Council Tax level for 2026/27 at the meeting on 24 February 2026.

Resolved –

That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy update as set out in the report and the associated appendices be noted, including:

- a) The Council's General Fund Budget Requirement of £210.975m for 2026/27 and an assumed increase in the band D Council Tax for the Council of 2.99% plus an additional 2.00% Adult Social Care precept, or £105.66 per annum representing a band D Council Tax of £2,223.18 per annum;**

- b) The current forecast budget gap of £4.449m for 2026/27 which would need to be addressed in order to present a balanced budget to Council in February 2026;**
- c) The proposed savings, efficiencies and increased income, fees and charges for 2026/27 of £8.649m already included within the current gap position as shown in Appendix 2;**
- d) The overall savings, efficiencies and increased income, fees and charges currently proposed within the MTFS of £13.792m;**
- e) The Housing Revenue Account budget for 2026/27 to 2028/29 as set out in Appendix 3, which included an assumed increase in social dwelling rents of 4.8% for 2026/27;**
- f) The General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programmes as set out in Appendices 4 and 5 respectively.**

55. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved –

That pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of item 56 below as it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to that Act.

56. 160 -163 FRIAR STREET READING

The Committee considered a report seeking authority to dispose of 160-163 Friar Street. The report provided feedback following a strategic review of the Council's options regarding investment assets. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix A - plan of the property
- Appendix B - detailed Asset Summary Report setting out the relevant information on the tenants, property related costs and values and recommended asset management actions
- Appendix C – high-level RAG rated options assessment
- Appendix D - Investment Review

Resolved –

- (1) That the freehold interest in 160-163 Friar Street be marketed for disposal as an investment/redevelopment opportunity;**
- 2) That the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Lead**

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Councillor for Planning & Assets, the Director of Finance and the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services, be authorised to dispose of the property to a selected bidder on the best terms available to secure Best Consideration.

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.49 pm)